

A Question of Mortality

Von viv-heart

Kapitel 1:

Without thinking Draco launched forward, his wings carrying him at lightning speed. Before he could blink, he was leaning over Hermione, worry all over his face, barely registering the pain that shot through his wings when the van hit him.

She was staring at him with wide eyes, shaking like a leaf in the wind, obviously unable to process what had happened.

"Are you alright, Granger?" he asked, still out of breath. He commanded his wings to disappear before he stood up carefully, offering his hand to help her up.

She didn't reply or take the hand in front of her and continued staring at him as if she were seeing a ghost. Considering a winged man had saved her from being hit by a van she might have.

And well, he was dead – at least technically. So much he had gathered.

"Fine," he sneered, letting his hand fall down to his side when she didn't make any indication she perceived anything that happened around her. He wasn't doing this out of his free will anyway.

"Malfoy," she said, her voice barely audible, when he turned to leave.

He stopped, looking over his shoulder at her, waiting, not sure what to expect.

So far, she hadn't done much but stare at him, frozen as if someone had stopped time, and barely breathing.

For a split second he had hoped she would believe that she had imagined him saving her the same way he hoped all the bystanders would think the wings they had seen were a product of their imagination thanks to some shock induced mass-hallucination.

Or that they hadn't seen them at all because the van obscured the view as he had landed directly between it and her.

But Granger never ceased to surprise him.

"You are alive." She was shaking even more as tears started falling from her eyes.

"You are alive."

It was enough for Draco to turn back hastily and crouch in front of her, believing that eye contact might prompt her to speak more.

"Do you know what happened to me?" he whispered with a mix of urgency and what one could call despair in his voice. He knew he didn't have much time as there were people around them who would interfere shortly – it was a rather busy street after all.

"Do you?"

She nodded and then shook her head abruptly after a brief pause. Before Draco could continue his questioning the bystanders finally woke up from their shock and a few rushed to them and to the driver of the van.

"I am fine," Draco glared at a woman too loud and too pushy for his taste. "Let me

leave," he demanded, attempting to break free from the crowd that had gathered and was trying to force him to stay and wait for the ambulance. He was in shock, they said. That it was impossible for the two of them to not get hurt. He would have laughed had he not been so annoyed.

Draco sneered at them all and had almost managed to break free when a hand clasped around his wrist and he turned around to yell at the person who dared to touch him. When he saw that it was Hermione Granger, who he had saved, and was doomed to save again and again, and who was looking at him with those big brown eyes of hers, and who seemed to hold the answers to his questions, he stopped.

"What?" he asked, the tone less biting than he would have liked. Being surrounded by such a huge mass of people after being almost alone for so long made him nervous. He had to physically stop himself from lashing out at everyone, with Hermione, the only person he knew, being an exception for some obscure reason he didn't want to dwell on.

When she didn't respond, Draco huffed. "If you want to come with me, Granger, get up. If you don't, let go!"

Hermione didn't let go and Draco started walking, pushing away all the people who tried to convince them both to stop as it was clear that Hermione was still in shock with how unresponsive she was but he didn't care and they made their way through the mass.

Draco didn't stop until they reached an empty side-street and turned to Hermione, who still hadn't said anything.

"Tell me what you know about me," he said as soon as he yanked his hand free from her grasp, stepping closer. "Everything."

"You have wings," Hermione said, ignoring his words completely and Draco had to close his eyes and count to ten silently to stop himself from screaming or punching something.

"Fine. This won't work. I get it. Forget it. Go back and get help. I'm leaving."

He summoned his wings even before he finished speaking and closed his eyes again in an attempt to concentrate so he could return to heaven or hell or whatever that lousy afterlife was. He spread his wings and pushed up, hoping to become one with the light just like he had when he had come back to the world of the living – not that he knew how exactly he had managed that. Nothing happened.

Well, that wasn't entirely true. He was hovering several feet over the ground but that was all. He certainly wasn't going to manage to get back this way.

Draco wasn't too disappointed about that if he was honest with himself, considering the afterlife was indeed quite lousy, but staying had a big catch: he had no place in the world of the living, having lost his the second he had died.

As he didn't know what else to do, Draco sank back to the ground in front of Hermione who was watching him with interest and awe.

"How is this possible?" she asked, pulled back to reality by the sight of the wings, bizarre as it was.

Draco would have contemplated if they had some kind of healing holy power if there weren't more pressing matters at hand.

"I am a guardian angel. Your guardian angel, to be precise," he said, gritting his teeth. Having known Hermione Granger his whole school life he knew that it would be easier to offer her some information if he wanted something back. It would be no use if she ran away, so he bit his tongue for once in his life – or death – and tried to be civil to her.

"Are you dead? I mean, people say the dead can turn into angels – so that would make angels dead, wouldn't it?" she asked with a frown, her eyes scanning his form as if she was looking at a rare, dangerous creature.

"You assumed I would be, judging by your reaction when you first saw me," Draco said, willing himself to speak calmly even though he would have loved to shake the answers out of her. Her usual Grangerness wasn't certainly making it any easier. "Why?"

Hermione bit her lip and looked away. "What do you know? I mean you know my name so you must know something." she said finally. "I need to know where to start. Because seriously, this has been a hell of a day so far and I want to go home and sleep because everything hurts and I am just so tired but I am talking to an actual angel with actual wings – unless this is some kind of crazy technology which wouldn't be surprising considering your wealth but then again you have been missing for years and there had been nothing in the news about you turning up and -"

Draco had to put a hand over Hermione's mouth to stop the rant and her eyes widened in surprise.

He stepped back immediately, cleaning his hand on his trousers.

"I can't tell you if you don't shut up," he muttered, but Hermione didn't seem fazed by it and simply continued staring at him, waiting for him to start talking.

"Look, I kind of woke up like this," he made a vague gesture at himself, "what I believe to be several years ago. It's hard to keep track of time up there. The only memories I have are of how I tormented you. I know my name, your name and that we were classmates and that I hated you. I don't even know why exactly. That means, you are the only person I know of who has any connection to me."

Hermione hold up her hands to stop him. "Wait. Are you telling me you don't know who you are? You don't know your parents, your friends, my friends? Nothing?"

At Draco's sour expression she began to laugh.

He crossed his arms and glared at her. "That's really not funny, Granger. Believe me, if I could, I would be standing here with somebody else. But I can't, considering the only person I know is you. It's some kind of divine punishment or other crap like that."

Hermione stopped laughing. Draco could almost hear the snap of her neck when her head turned into his direction abruptly so she could look him into the eyes, fixating him with her stare. "Oh really? Is that what you want? How about I dump you on one of your former friends then?"

Draco didn't know what to feel or say. He hadn't considered the possibility that there were people who had cared about him still out there and he would be able to meet them. "You could do that?"

He hated himself for how hopeful he sounded, how weak, but it was better than anything he had ever imagined, not that he had thought it possible to enter the world of the living before he had tried to save Hermione and ended up there accidentally.

"Obviously." Her voice was cold and Draco felt the fine hair on his neck stand up. The thing was, that it wasn't from fear. Draco knew for a fact that he had never been scared of Hermione Granger before, not when she had slapped him back in the day, and certainly not now, and yet something unsettled him. It irked him, that he couldn't put a finger on what exactly that was.

"That would be great," he said with a forced smile, ignoring his sudden discomfort.

"Follow me." Hermione turned around and started walking in the direction of the main street, not checking once if he was following her.

Draco needed a second before he realized that she had moved and he hurried to catch

up with her.

"You could tell me what you know while we walk," he said, pushing his hands into his empty pockets. It felt wrong to not have anything in them, even though he couldn't remember a time when he did.

"How about no."

Draco stopped in his tracks, not having expected the answer. "And why the hell not?"

"You tell me." Hermione hadn't bothered to stop or turn around and continued her way as if it didn't matter to her if he followed or not.

Even though it was certainly possible that it really didn't matter to her, years of watching her and over her told Draco that she was bothered by something judging by her tense shoulders and overly straight back.

"What have I done now?" He jogged after her, scared that he would lose her on the busy street. Damn London and its huge population.

"I am aware that I was never your favourite person, Malfoy, but you could at least try to be nice to me if you want my help." She finally stopped and was glaring daggers into him, her head held high, but her arms crossed in front of her.

She was clearly going on the defensive, trying to hide how hurt and overwhelmed she was, but Draco had caught the faint glimmer of tears before she turned around again and continued her walk.

"Look," he fell into step next to her, "I haven't been around people for ages."

He knew that it wasn't much of an apology, but he had never been good at those and she was overreacting quite a bit in his opinion.

"Well, then I suggest you talk less and watch more. That way, you might even learn those social norms you have missed when you were a kid."

Draco caught her arm, using centrifugal force to spin her around so she was facing him.

"Do you think I am any happier with this situation than you are?" he hissed, tightening his grip when she struggled to get away. "I am fucking dependant on you here, Granger, and I hate it. But I would hate it no matter who I was stuck with so get over yourself and tell me what I want to know."

Draco hadn't expected the kick to his shin and yelped, but didn't let go. Disappointment flashed over Hermione's face but was instantly replaced with anger.

"Stop manhandling me!"

"Stop being a bitch!" Draco caught her other arm, holding her in place. He was glad that they hadn't reached the busy street yet, having the argument just around the corner, and weren't therefore attracting much attention.

"Let go or I'll scream for help!" Hermione said with a dangerous glint in her eyes.

"Only if you promise to not run away."

"I won't run away."

Draco let go reluctantly and Hermione started massaging her arm immediately. He looked away, putting his hands into his pockets again, waiting for her to speak. He was making her angrier and angrier with every word he said so staying silent for a while seemed the best course of action if he ever wanted to reach that supposed friend of his.

"I assume you don't have any kind of ticket for public transport or money."

Draco looked at her in confusion. "Excuse me?"

Hermione rolled her eyes. "What have I expected? A Malfoy and to use public transport? It was probably such an insignificant part of your life that you have forgotten all about it."

"I know what public transport is! But why would we need it?"

Hermione laughed at his question and ran a hand through her hair. "You are serious, aren't you? To get to your friend, obviously."

"But can't we just, like, walk?" Draco asked hopefully, remembering how nervous he had been earlier when they were surrounded by people. "Or I don't know, call a cab?"

"I want to get rid of you as soon as I can, so no, walking the two hours to his place isn't an option. And as I don't have money to spare, a cab isn't either. So you either take the tube with me or I can give you the address and you find your way on your own. Your choice," she stuck out her chin, clearly challenging him.

Draco gulped as fear gripped his stomach and didn't want to let go. He wasn't sure if it was the thought of being surrounded by so many people or being in such a tight space underground, but his head began to spin.

It must have showed, because Hermione's expression softened and she stepped closer.

"Is something wrong?"

Draco gripped his head with both hands as pain struck him, clutching it as he collapsed. The smell of fresh earth filled his nostrils and he gasped in a desperate attempt to fill his lungs with air. "I don't know. I don't know."

Hermione crouched down next to him, her eyes wide and her hands shaking as she reached forward to turn him to his side in a confused attempt to stabilize him.

The pain was gone as suddenly as it had come and Draco let his hands fall down, his breathing ragged.

"Should I call an ambulance?" Hermione asked, her voice a pitch higher than it normal, as she searched her bag for her phone.

"Hell no," Draco sat up slowly, "Let's just not take the tube."

Hermione nodded, but continued watching him with concern, her hands still shaking slightly.

"I think bus might be fine," Draco added after a while and she scrambled to her feet to help him up as well.

They made their way to the nearest bus stop a few streets away in silence, even though Hermione glanced in Draco's direction every few seconds which annoyed him immensely.

"What?" he snapped when she didn't cease to do it even after they arrived at the stop.

"Do you really have no idea what happened to you?"

Draco pinched the back of his nose, counting to ten in his mind once again in an attempt to calm himself down.

She must have taken his silence as a no as she continued talking. "You know, you disappeared. Somebody demanded money for your return after it became public, but it's not clear if they really were responsible for it, as they were never caught and you weren't found. You are listed as missing till today."

The words startled Draco into looking at her, but the bus arrived before he could ask more questions.

Hermione paid for his ticket, using her own regular card, and Draco followed her to the back of the bus where they found two empty seats.

"Is that all?" he asked as soon as they sat down.

"Yes. I would have thought that you were alive and had a kind of selective amnesia, weren't it for..." she trailed off, staring out of the window.

"Weren't it for the wings." Draco finished the sentence for her.

They didn't speak for the remainder of the ride, Draco opting to stare at the seat in

front of him. He felt numb and couldn't form a coherent thought and certainly didn't feel like speaking. Hermione's words had caught him by surprise. He didn't know what he had expected, but certainly not that.

When she told him that they needed to get off the bus he followed her instructions obediently.

Only when they entered a huge apartment complex and she led them towards the elevator did he protest again.

Hermione gave him a weird look, but turned towards the stairs anyway, for which he was really grateful.

Luckily, the person they were seeking out lived on the third floor and they didn't have to walk too long. It was still enough for them to be out of breath when they finally reached their destination.

Hermione gave him a weak smile before walking towards a door and pounding against it.

"The bell doesn't work," she looked over her shoulder at Draco and he shrugged. She seemed to know this supposed friend of his quite well and it didn't sit right with him. For all the interactions he remembered with her, there wasn't a single one that suggested they had even one mutual friend.

"Who's there?" a deep voice came from behind the door, pulling Draco back into the reality.

"Hermione Granger," she said with an anxious glance over at Draco before turning back to the door.

For a moment only rustling of chains could be heard but then the door opened, revealing a tall dark-skinned man.

"What do you want, Gra-" he started but froze when his eyes landed on Draco.

"Malfoy?"